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SUBJECT: BASRAH PROVINCE: THE ISSUES, THE LEADERS,
POSSIBLE STEPS AHEAD

Classified By: Classified by Robert Gilchrist, Political Counselor, for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S) Summary: Basrah province is home to Iraq,s second largest city and has an estimated population of 2.4 million, the majority of which are Shi,a. Basrah is also Iraq,s economic center; over 80 % of the country,s commerce passes through its ports. Security concerns center around targeted assassinations of tribal leaders, Iraqi Security Force personnel, and professionals, as militia groups such as JAM and Badr, and various tribes jockey for power. The keys to reducing violence are promoting economic growth and stemming Iranian influence. New jobs could create alternative to the Iranian supported militias that foment instability. New provincial elections could help restore confidence in local leaders. This is one of a series of cables from Regional Embassy Offices and Provincial Reconstruction Teams analyzing the governates of Iraq. End summary.

POLITICAL ISSUES

12. (C) Basrah province is home to Iraq,s second largest city and has an estimated population of 2.4 million, the majority of which are Shi,a. The provincial governor purports to support coalition efforts but, in REO's view, is a kleptocrat whose grasp on power is threatened by rival factions. He has overcome attempts to remove him from office and survived an attempted assassination. He and other political figures, supported by various militia, vie for power and resources and try to limit Baghdad,s take. Numerous political parties have strong ties to Iran.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

13. (C) Basrah is also Iraq,s economic center; over 80 % of the country,s commerce passes through the ports around Umm Qasr and the oil refineries that dot the landscape. Corruption is an integrated part of the economy. Criminal gangs, various police units, and militias compete for economic control through a range of illicit activities, including assassinations and smuggling. Basrah city suffers from a dearth of essential services. The city,s power supply is irregular with a majority of customers receiving less than eight hours a day. Trash pickup is also an ongoing problem as contracts are handed out, money is collected but the trash piles up. Medical supplies often run short. Basrah,s unemployment rate amongst men 18-45 ranges between 30% and 40%. Militias reportedly recruit from this group to launch attacks against coalition compounds, paying, for

instance, up to \$150 per successful launch into the Basrah Palace Compound

SECURITY ISSUES

¶4. (S) Security concerns center around targeted assassinations of tribal leaders, Iraqi Security Force personnel, and professionals, as militia groups such as JAM and Badr, and various tribes jockey for power. As a result, there is a high degree of Shi'a on Shi'a violence. Sunni) Shi'a violence is relatively minimal, because most of the Sunnis were driven out after the Samarra mosque bombing. The general consensus is that there is little law and order since the Iraqi Police are the main culprits of the violence, and Basrah,s leaders do little, if anything, to stop it.

KEY POLITICAL FIGURES

¶5. (S) Basrah Governor Mohammed Moassibh Al Wa,eli of the Fadillah Party is best described as a duplicitous crook whose primary goal is personal enrichment. He is heavily involved in oil smuggling and uses the Oil Protection Force as his private militia. A compromise candidate for governor in January 2005, Governor Mohammed secured his current position because he was neither strong enough nor extreme enough to worry either OMS or SCIRI. However, he has made many enemies, and his life is under constant threat.

¶6. (S) Ismail Al Wa'eli, brother to Governor Mohammed

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Moassibh Al Wa,eli (Fadillah), wields undeniable influence over Basrah's local government. He ran for a seat in the COR last year, but did not win enough votes. Nevertheless, he is rumored to assume the Governor's role when his brother is out of Basrah. A thug with political aspirations and not much education, Ismail reportedly heads the Fadillah party's militia in Basrah and some of the death squads that roam the city.

¶7. (S) Seyid Yusif Al Batat, head of the Thar Allah militia, is a notorious figure in Basrah, who receives Iranian support for his militia. Seyid Yusif seeks a legitimate political role and has been waging war against the Governor,s private militia. He has asked us not to interfere when succeeds in killing the Governor.

¶8. (S) Majed Al Sari, the Defense Minister,s Intelligence Advisor for the South, is a key REO source, who heads his own militia. He is in contact with most other militias and has attempted to act as an intermediary between JAM and UK forces. He holds no political office, but is an advisor to the Iraqi Minister of Defense. He made &peace8 with the Governor during a REO tea in September but will not meet with him at his residence.

¶9. (S) Major General Abdul Latif, head of the Iraqi Army 10th Division is one of the few good news stories - the most forward thinking of all our ISF contacts. He is respect tribal leaders and politicians, and he evaded and attempt by the Governor to replace him with a crony. General Abdul Latif works with UK forces to increase the standards of conduct for his troops. He does not have enough men to secure Basrah city or Province and would need to double his force strength to match the effectiveness of UK forces. Both he and his officer corps are under increasing risk due to their cooperation with UK forces.

¶10. (S) Chairman of the Emergency Security Committee Major General Ali Al-Hammadi was appointed by the Prime Minister in August 2006. Officially he could wield more power than the governor, but is politically inept. The British military use

him as a conduit to the central government.

¶11. (S) Chief of Police Mohammed Al Hammadi has been unable to purge his forces of militia elements. The majority of his force is corrupt, and they are responsible for the majority of the crimes taking place in Basrah city, including kidnappings, torture, and murders. He often calls in the Iraqi Army's 10th Division to assist in security operations, including at his own police stations.

¶12. (S) Seyid Baha Ahmed Jamal Al Deen (Da'awa), a Shia Imam from a well-known and respected family is an influential Islamic moderate. He managed an NGO before being elected to the council, and he has an untouchable reputation as a religious man who cares for the poor and needy. He maintains open lines of communication with Coalition partners and has expressed interest in mounting projects to employ poor people in Basrah.

¶13. (S) Seyid Ali Al Musawi is the most prominent Shia imam in Basrah and one of the wealthiest individuals in the city. He is the spiritual leader of the Al Shakheyah sect, a minority Shia sect founded by Sheikh Ahmad Al Insa'i in the nineteenth century that has followers in several countries in the Middle East. He is politically moderate and not antagonistic toward Sunni and Christian minorities. He owns hospital, a construction company and a handful of shops in Basrah; leads the largest mosque in the city; and conducts philanthropic activities.

¶14. (S) Sheikh Mansour Al Kanaan is the leader of the Al Kanaan tribe and a former member of the Transitional National Assembly representing the Iraqi Unified Alliance. He leads one of the largest tribes and wields considerable influence. A lawyer by training, Sheikh Mansour acted as a tribal judge, and his good relations with other tribes in Basrah enhances his reputation. He owns a newspaper, a construction company, and an organization that promotes human rights. A harsh critic of the dysfunctional Basrah Provincial Council, he founded the Gathering to Save Basrah, an informal council that exercises moral authority over the Council.

¶15. (S) Hassan al-Rashid is the General Secretary of Badr and former governor. He is an astute political operator who seeks to turn Badr into a legitimate political party. He is

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the most professional politician in the province and has close ties to Iran.

POSSIBLE STEPS FORWARD

¶16. (S) The keys to reducing violence are promoting economic growth and stemming Iranian influence. We need to create jobs as an alternative to the Iranian supported militias that foment instability and fire on coalition compounds with near impunity. As the economic hub and port city, Basrah could attract FDI if the security situation were stabilized.

¶17. (S) In order to strengthen democratic institutions, the provincial elections laws must be passed and provincial elections scheduled. Otherwise, the limited confidence in the central and provincial government will wane further.

¶18. (S) Improving security will require continued cooperation between the Iraqi Army and UK forces. Operation Sinbad expires in January 2007, and the UK plans to cede provincial control to the Iraq forces (PIC) and draw down in size and mission in spring 2007. However, we doubt that the Iraqi security forces will be ready to assume control by this spring and worry that the reduction in UK forces could lead to an increase in violence as militias and tribes jockey for power.

¶19. (C) Reconciliation is not a top priority as Basrah does not suffer from the high degree of Sunni) Shi,a violence that Baghdad does.

SCOBAY